

“Exalted by Humility”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
November 5, 2023 - Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 26
[Joshua 3:7-17; Matthew 23:1-12](#)

News alert: The Beatles broke up. You’re probably aware of this by now as the sad split happened 53 years ago, but sometimes news travels slowly, and so I’m sorry if you’re just now learning about this.

I also have an alert about some more recent news about the Fab Four: Although they have not been making music together since 1970, and two of the band’s members, John Lennon and George Harrison, have since passed away, the Beatles officially released a new song this week called “Now and Then.” The song was initially recorded by John Lennon on a cassette tape by a boom box as he played piano and sang in his home sometime in the late 70s. The recording was very rough and noisy and included sound from a television that was also on.

Sometime in the mid-1990s, years after John’s death, George Harrison recorded guitar tracks for the song, even though the original cassette tape recording was pretty much unusable. That is, it *was* unusable then, but it is usable now, thanks to Artificial Intelligence computing technology. AI was trained to other recordings of John to recognize the features of his voice and to remove everything else from the original recording other than his singing, a process called “demixing.” This gave producers, including Giles Martin, son of original Beatles producer George Martin, a “demixed,” clean track of John’s voice, isolated from the original home-recorded tape, that could then be handled as any other higher quality studio recording. Lennon’s piano playing from the original recording was “demixed” in the same way. George’s guitar track, already recorded in a studio before his passing in 2001, was added as were new bass guitar recordings from Paul McCartney, drum tracks from Ringo Starr, and new vocal and string ensemble tracks. The result of the “demixing,” recording, and remixing process is a wonderful, curious, new-but-old Beatles tune of four minutes in length that is now available for streaming online.

I call your attention to this story because I believe that there are some good lessons in it for living that are related to lessons from our scripture readings from

Joshua and Matthew. One of these is that sometimes the work of new creation in our lives comes about only after we go through processes similar to “demixing,” of having the real, core aspects of who we are be isolated and revealed, not through AI however, but through the highs and, especially, the lows of life’s journey.

For the Israelites of our story from Joshua, the “demixing” through difficulty happened over the course of many hard years, from the time they were led through the dried up Red Sea and into the barren wilderness by Moses until the time his protégé Joshua led the people from the wilderness through the dried up Jordan River and into the land of promise. A generation-long time of wandering through the wilderness had humbled them completely, bringing them to a point in which they had to rely upon God and God’s provision for them, as they had nothing else. Through the difficult, humiliating journey, the noise of identifying themselves as a people enslaved by Egypt to serve the pharaoh was stripped away; their remembrance of worshipping Egypt’s gods was purged; and they were remixed as a new people in a new land who understood themselves to be servants of their God alone, who worshipped their God alone, and who followed the commandments of their God alone.

In today’s gospel lesson from Matthew, Jesus talks about the value of humility, which means being brought close to the ground, and he states that those who are brought low, perhaps through humiliating, “demixing,” revealing journeys, like the Israelites 40-year-long sojourn in the wilderness, or through personal tragedies, losses, or brokenness, will be lifted up by God, and those most blessed are those who willingly humble themselves, choosing to take on the role of servant of God and others.

On this All Saints Sunday, we are remembering our saints, those who served God and others as members of our church or community or as beloved members of our families whose bodies have been brought low to the ground as they have passed on from this world. We remember, with gratitude, these members of our band and their examples of love and service they have shown us, and we hold on to these examples and are inspired by them to live as servants on our own journeys and on the journey we share as a congregation.

So let us follow the lead of good examples set by faithful servants of God who have gone before us. Let us be humbly mix into our own lives actions inspired by their memory. Let us be willing to be remixed again and again by God, who always takes us, whoever we are, just as we are, and works to make something new and good in us and through us. As we receive the gift of communion, which reminds us that Christ's broken and humble but resurrected and exalted life is within us, let us rejoice and celebrate with thanksgiving God's ongoing work of re-creation. And let us be open to being used by God as a church to do some new healing work in our broken and hurting world. May God work through us as a community of servants to offer the world a beautiful new song, that more of God's peace with be in the world and with each of us. Amen.